

to talk about what the Affordable Care Act means to them. All of them are opposed and concerned for the repeal of the Affordable Care Act.

We talked about how important it was to protect the 695,000 Michiganders who have gained coverage since the ACA was enacted and the fact that the uninsured rate in Michigan has been cut in half.

The story that struck me the most was from a local clergyman, Bishop Walter Starghill, who gained coverage for the first time through Medicaid expansion. He told me:

The impact on Black men with increased access to insurance coverage is big. We didn't take care of ourselves until it was too late. We ended up in the emergency room and some of us died. Now we can get checked out early.

I heard from another local UAW worker who said:

I come from a family where many members have struggled with cancer. We wouldn't have healthcare coverage after leaving our jobs or we'd have gone bankrupt without the ACA.

Everywhere I go in the district, people are frightened and come up and say: What will happen?

Tomorrow, you need to look people in the eye and tell them why you are taking their insurance away.

APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GAETZ). The Chair announces the Speaker's appointment, pursuant to 15 U.S.C. 1024(a), and the order of the House of January 3, 2017, of the following Members on the part of the House to the Joint Economic Committee:

Mr. PAULSEN, Minnesota
Mr. SCHWEIKERT, Arizona
Mrs. COMSTOCK, Virginia
Mr. LAHOOD, Illinois
Mr. FRANCIS ROONEY, Florida
Mrs. CAROLYN MALONEY, New York
Mr. DELANEY, Maryland
Ms. ADAMS, North Carolina
Mr. BEYER, Virginia

INTRODUCING REPUBLICAN FRESHMAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to be here tonight. As we all get started in a new session, we get started with the newness and excitement. We have already hit the ground running.

This Congress is going to be one of action. The American people spoke. They spoke loudly—they have been over the past few years—saying that the direction of our country needed to change. By changing, they meant change toward a government that is

more conservative, one that is listening to them and hasn't forgot that it is not about the government worker that we are about in this place and not about government in and of itself, but it is about what government does for the American people.

Tonight, as I have taken on my role as the vice chair in the Republican Conference, we have been talking about how we can introduce our Members and also work to get our messaging out.

Tonight is the first night where we have some of our new freshmen here on the floor, Mr. Speaker, as you can well attest to. We are going to take time just to get to know them, where they came from, introduce them to the floor, and introduce them to what we are going to be about and what their passion is to share with as part of our majority going forward.

The first gentleman is a dear friend from my home State of Georgia. He is, as what we call back home a dagg, D-A-G-G. We don't use the extra G, but we will do the first G. How about that?

He is a mayor from West Point, Georgia. He understands what real life is about. He understands about making jobs and getting people taken care of. He also is a dentist. He is going to stay on this side of the aisle tonight, Mr. Speaker, because I am not going over there to find out anything about that.

We are excited to have him. It is going to be a good time tonight.

I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. FERGUSON).

Mr. FERGUSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to deliver my first remarks on the House floor.

Before I became mayor of West Point, I watched my hometown almost fall completely apart. I saw what happened when bad Washington policies almost destroyed my hometown by creating the environment for manufacturing jobs to go overseas. I watched Federal programs that were failing to meet the needs of my friends and neighbors try to take the place of good jobs.

The Federal programs weren't fixing the underlying programs in my hometown. They were simply catching people in the cycle of poverty, and we surely didn't want a handout. We wanted jobs.

I was faced with a choice of whether or not to move my dental practice and my family away from my hometown to a more profitable community or get involved and be part of the solution. I chose to get involved and work to better the lives of my neighbors and my hometown.

Instead of being satisfied with one-size-fits-all government programs that simply perpetuated the existing problems, we worked to bring manufacturing jobs back to West Point, Georgia, by making targeted investments in economic development and infrastructure.

We attracted a Kia Motors manufacturing plant, and the automotive industry brought with it suppliers and

other related businesses that produced over 15,000 jobs in just a few years.

□ 1815

The city of West Point and the surrounding area today is revitalized not because of Federal Government programs or regulations, but because we worked at the local level to find solutions to meet the needs of our area.

I ran for Congress so that I could apply these lessons at the Federal level. We need policies that make America the most competitive place in the world to do business instead of creating policies that incentivize companies to take their jobs overseas. We need policies that help get people out of poverty instead of trapping them in a multigenerational cycle of poverty.

I know firsthand that more government programs do not make communities, schools, or individuals great. In fact, I have lived through and governed out of the dependence created by bad D.C. policy and government programs that continue to trap people in poverty.

What we have collectively done to those in poverty with these policies is morally wrong. There is a better way, and we will do right by our fellow Americans. I am excited to work with my colleagues to craft and enact these policies that will improve the lives of our citizens.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman from Georgia and his passion to serve and be a part of what is going to be going on here. We are a week away from the inauguration of our new President-elect, and we are excited about that and moving forward.

As we move across the country, all the way to Arizona, our next speaker is the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. BIGGS). I am looking forward to serving with ANDY BIGGS on the Judiciary Committee. His background is working to promote a conservative, small-business agenda, which is something that is going to be valuable here. He is also an author. For those of us working in intellectual property and copyright, that is very important. There is so much job creation that is made by the intellectual spark that comes from our entrepreneurs. Tonight I am honored to have the second of our speakers, ANDY BIGGS from Arizona's Fifth Congressional District.

I yield to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. BIGGS).

Mr. BIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia for yielding, and I am grateful for this opportunity to introduce myself to this Chamber.

My name is ANDY BIGGS. I represent Arizona's Fifth Congressional District. I hope to pick up where my good friend and predecessor, former Congressman Matt Salmon, left off. He left me big shoes to fill, but I am blessed to be able to counsel with him, and I am honored to follow his example.

My district covers parts of the southeast metropolitan area of Phoenix, the

cities of Chandler, Gilbert, Mesa, Queen Creek, and communities like Sun Lakes. Many families have lived there for generations. They are hard-working, patriotic, and faith-driven people.

I am a native Arizonan, one of the few. I live in Gilbert with my wife of 35 years, Cindy. We have six children and four grandchildren. I received my bachelor's degree in Asian Studies from Brigham Young University, my master's degree from Arizona State University, and my law degree from the University of Arizona, and I have pursued additional graduate work.

For the past 14 years, I have had the opportunity to serve in the Arizona State legislature where I served as the senate president for the last 4 years. During that time, we balanced the budget, going from the worst budget situation in the Nation on a per capita basis, and we reduced taxes. We cut government regulations. We asserted Arizona's 10th Amendment rights, and protected life at all stages.

When Congressman Salmon decided to retire last year, he asked me to run for his seat to ensure that his constituents would continue to receive the adherence to conservative principles that Congressman Salmon stood for. After a four-way primary, I won my primary election by 27 votes.

On the campaign trail last year, I promised my constituents that I would fight to achieve six major goals and introduce bills to reflect those goals in this Congress:

Preventing Members of Congress from being paid until a balanced budget is passed. Yahoo.

Reining in bureaucratic rulemaking and restoring Article I authority to Congress.

Ending the ObamaCare loophole that is designed to benefit Members of Congress.

Passing Grant's law to protect innocent U.S. citizens from violent illegal immigrants.

Ensuring that Common Core never becomes a Federal mandate and that States and local officials have authority over the teaching of our Nation's youth.

And my sixth initiative is to remove Arizona from the out-of-control, overburdened, and out-of-whack 9th Federal Circuit Court district and placing it into a newly established district that more accurately reflects Arizona's values and promotes and protects due process rights.

I have worked hard to achieve these goals already, and will continue to pursue those goals.

Last week, Members of this body were filled with great optimism and enthusiasm for the future. I am hopeful that we will continue in that spirit as we await a new administration and strive to do the bidding of our constituents. I will never forget the people who elected me to this high office and the principles that are important to them and my home, Arizona.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman.

Again, we see the quality and we see who the American people have sent here, people like ANDY BIGGS. We got started with the REINS Act, a bill that I sponsored that talked about reining in regulations. Andy jumped in with a couple of amendments. He wanted to be a part of the solution to start with.

Next up is a gentleman from Kentucky, the First District of Kentucky, Mr. COMER. He comes to us from a farm background. He wore the blue jacket and the green jacket, 4-H and FFA. He was the Commissioner of Agriculture for the State of Kentucky. He has been a legislator. He also is a good friend of my Commissioner of Agriculture, Gary Black. Gary called me up and said there is a good one in Kentucky. I said when Gary says that, we know something good is going on.

It is my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to yield to the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. COMER).

Mr. COMER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia for yielding. It is indeed an honor to be a Member of this great body. I ran a 14-month campaign for Congress not simply to have a prestigious title ahead of my name or to simply come to Washington to point fingers at the other political party and blame everybody else for our Nation's many problems. Rather, I ran for Congress so I could come here and work to solve our Nation's many challenges.

The First Congressional District of Kentucky stretches from the foothills of Appalachia all the way to the western most counties along the Mississippi River. It is a conservative, rural district comprised of 35 unique counties with the main industries being agriculture, coal, and manufacturing.

My constituents feel like Washington has forgotten them. Unfair trade agreements have cost us good-paying manufacturing jobs. The EPA's war on coal has devastated the coal economy and its massive economic spin-off. Overburdensome regulations like waters of the U.S. threaten the viability of our family farmers, and an unsustainable government takeover of our healthcare system, better known as ObamaCare, has significantly increased healthcare premiums on my small businesses and working middle-class families.

Mr. Speaker, as I stand here today, there is a great sense of hope in Kentucky. My district voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump and voted out of office six incumbent Democrat State representatives. My people expressed their displeasure at the polls, and for once they feel like their voices were heard and their votes mattered.

I have heard my people's cries. As a farmer, small-business owner, and parent of three small children, I have also felt their pain.

Mr. Speaker, I pledge here today to work with my fellow freshmen colleagues, the incoming Trump administration, and the leadership in Congress

to make America great again. I am proud that in the first 2 weeks of this Congress we have passed bills to undo the regulatory damage that the Obama administration has done to our businesses. In the coming weeks, I look forward to repealing the failing ObamaCare healthcare system and replacing it with a market-driven healthcare fix. I am confident that I can play a role in working with the new administration to renegotiate our main trade deals to ensure that American workers are on a level playing field.

There is a better way to run America. The assault on the private sector must end. The disregard and disrespect for conservative, pro-family values must end. The bloated Federal Government must shrink and Congress must regain control of our Federal Government away from unelected bureaucrats. That is the will of the people of Kentucky One.

The voters spoke loudly on November 8. I look forward to working with my fellow freshmen colleagues to ensure that we improve our economy, abide by the Constitution, and restore the confidence of the American people.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. I thank the gentleman.

Those are exciting values. My district is one of the more rural agricultural districts. We are not far from Atlanta, but poultry is important to my district, and I appreciate him bringing those values to us.

Mr. Speaker, our next speaker is BRIAN MAST from Florida. I got to know BRIAN when he was running for this office. I got to visit with him in his district as he was running.

Let me just say that many times we talk about elections with campaign ads and speeches, and all of those kind of things that are very true, but it is also when a person connects with the people they are representing. When they connect with them in such a way that it sort of even transcends their ideological perspective. I remember a story that I want to tell. We were at a polling precinct and we were holding signs. People were early voting. I remember one lady parked her car and got her young child out. She came up to BRIAN and said: I am a Democrat; I am voting for other Democrats, but I am voting for you, and I wanted my daughter to meet you.

When you make that kind of connection, that is what makes America great. That is the kind of connection people need to have with their Federal Government. That is why the people's House is such a special place to be, and the people's House has a special Representative from Florida.

I now yield to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MAST), representing Florida's 18th Congressional District.

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. COLLINS) for including me in this Special Order tonight and for yielding to me and for becoming a friend of mine.

Mr. Speaker, it is with tremendous honor and humility that I rise to represent the hardworking values of the 18th Congressional District of Florida, with communities like Palm Beach Gardens, home of the PGA tour; Stuart, Florida, home to the U.S. Sailing Academy; Port St. Lucie, the spring training home of the New York Mets; and Fort Pierce, Florida, the home of the only Navy UDT-SEAL Museum in the entire country. It is an amazing place for anyone to go to.

Before I go any further, I do want to—and I know I am joined by the rest of my freshmen colleagues, and probably the entire body, when I say that our thoughts and our prayers have been with our new colleague, Mr. RUTHERFORD from the Fourth District of Florida, the sheriff as I call him. He is a friend and a patriot. I know that we are all praying for his speedy recovery.

As I talk to people in my community, there is one issue that keeps them up at night more than any other issue, and that issue is the water quality in our area, or rather, the lack thereof. I can tell you, it is nonnegotiable. It is a nonnegotiable priority for me, that we allow the water in our community, water that used to be so blue that it looked like something out of a postcard, to once again become clean for this generation and for future generations.

When I was studying at Harvard, I studied the environment. I did very specific work in watershed infrastructure. I can tell you, it doesn't take an academic to know that these waterways are irreplaceable treasures. They are central to the economy and the quality of life in our region. It is why most people I know make our 18th District home, why they call it some place that they want to live for the rest of their life. It is the water and it is the weather. To tell you the truth, if you take the water away, the weather isn't always that comfortable.

Right now there is water being discharged from the center of our State, Lake Okeechobee into the Treasure Coast of Florida, destroying our community, putting our people out of business, killing sea life, and making people sick. What makes our community so beautiful is literally being robbed from us, and this cannot continue. Our lagoon and our estuaries have to be restored. I will work endlessly to strengthen the partnership between our local, State, and Federal agencies to upgrade that infrastructure; not just talk about it, but actually get it done because this is life or death for the community that I represent.

□ 1830

Mr. Speaker, if I sound heated over this, it is because I am heated over this. When I look back at history and see that the Panama Canal took less than a decade to build once the United States Government got involved, that the Hoover Dam was built and open in 5 years, as far as I can tell, construc-

tion technology has only improved since the 1930s, but the infrastructure restoration surrounding Lake Okeechobee and the Florida Everglades is taking decades. It is an absolute embarrassment that the water infrastructure projects in Florida are taking so long and at such a great social and economic cost to communities like my own. We can't afford to wait any longer, and this will be my top priority.

Another issue that I hear about constantly is from people in our community talking about the role America's weak foreign policy over the last 8 years has played in destabilizing the Middle East and making our country and communities—places like Fort Pierce, where the terrorist who attacked the Orlando nightclub lived, where he worshipped—making our country less safe.

As a Member of Congress, I will work every day to provide the men and women of our armed services with the tools and the flexibility that they need to do their job and to come home alive.

When I was serving in the Army, I had the honor to work alongside the best men and women that I have ever known. I worked as a bomb technician in our highest level of military special operations; and under the cover of darkness in Afghanistan, our job was to kill or capture the most menacing targets each and every night that we could find.

I witnessed firsthand the extremists that want to literally destroy our way of life. My scars and the scars of my fellow veterans and peers, they should be a continual reminder of the enemy that we are fighting and why the work that we are doing is so important.

For me, on September 19, 2010, I found my last explosive device, and it wasn't that much different from so many others that have claimed the lives of friends of mine. It was homemade explosives encapsulated in pieces of glass—nails, ball bearings, shrapnel that was meant to detonate whenever it was stepped on.

Mr. Speaker, the people that put that bomb there, that manufactured that device, who have killed or wounded our bravest men and women, their goal is to wipe our country and our allies off the face of this Earth, to bring that same war to our hometowns as they have done in so many places already, places like New York and Boston and Chattanooga, San Bernardino, Fort Hood, and Orlando.

Eight years of failed international leadership has created a vacuum of power that is being filled by ISIS and other terrorist groups. ISIS right now has more money, more land, more resources than al Qaeda did at 9/11.

Sitting back and waiting for peace, that is not a strategy. Containment, that is not a strategy. We need an aggressive strategy to root out extremists, eliminate any safe haven to prevent future attacks on the United States of America.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I am as well aware as anybody that defeating those who come against us out of a hatred, it comes at a cost. Friends of mine—too many friends of mine—have lost three or four limbs, have been blinded, have been covered on their entire body with burns, have had massive head trauma or some combination of all of the above injuries.

Sadly, I am also aware of how often the VA fails these men and women, and I can tell you that it is not an option. We have to do better. We owe our veterans better than the care that they are getting right now.

Improving care for our veterans, it starts with reforming the Department of Veterans Affairs. I strongly believe that the best way to do this is to give veterans the flexibility to choose anytime, anywhere medical care. The increased competition will force the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide a higher quality of care to our servicemen and -women.

Beyond this, we have to eliminate the corruption and the incompetence at the Department of Veterans Affairs to reduce the claims backlog currently plaguing the VA hospitals across the country. These pending claims make it nearly impossible for the men and women who fought in places like Iwo Jima, the Chosin Reservoir, Saigon, Mogadishu, Kandahar, Mosul, and any other places to live their life, as they have to wait years for a decision from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Fixing these problems will ensure that the future generations of servicemen and -women are not burdened with the same challenges that today's veterans are facing.

In addition to physical health care, we have to do more to help veterans with mental health care. There is a stat that is thrown around all too often that there are more than 20 veterans a day who take their own life. I have known some of them. I could tell you how that is an unacceptable rate that far exceeds the average of the civilian population. But the fact is, to lose just one veteran from suicide is completely unacceptable.

This is very personal to me. I have seen firsthand the impact that war can have on soldiers returning home, all of whom daily work through the trauma of having friends whom they are forced to remember who didn't come home with them.

Not a week goes by where I don't get a call from someone who wants to talk about the fact that they want to step in front of a bus or go to sleep in their garage with the car running and never wake up. Often this call comes after a traumatizing experience that they have just had at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We need to be there for one another, and we need to be there for our veterans. I think often about something that President Kennedy once said. He said:

The cost of freedom has always been high, but Americans have always been willing to pay that price.

Our veterans, they do pay that price. They make tremendous personal sacrifices. But just because they are always going to be there and they are always willing to make these sacrifices for our freedom, that doesn't mean that we can take their service for granted, which is exactly what is happening every single time one of our veterans is failed.

I am committed to doing all that I can to increase mental health resources for our veterans and doing anything, whether that is legislatively or personally, to reduce veteran suicide rates.

But we also have to do more to assist returning veterans in finding jobs and starting new careers once they do exit the military. I know that the men and women that I served with were among the most talented and hardworking men and women that I have ever met in this entire world.

Veterans know what it is like to work in high-pressure situations, to be held to a standard of excellence. They know the stress of loading their body down with hundreds of pounds of equipment and trekking that across long distances, working together as a team. They know what it takes to go out there and get the job done, no matter what challenge is placed in front of them. And they know what it is to not just risk the bottom line, but to actually go out there and put their own life on the line.

Veterans are among the most qualified employees for any position. But veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan, they face an unemployment rate that is substantially higher than the national average. I am committed to working with local businesses and community leaders to discuss ways to reverse this troubling trend, as well as supporting legislation that will help our veterans use the very unique skills and talents that they have developed for the rest of their life.

Mr. Speaker, following my service in the U.S. Army, I made a very conscious choice to volunteer with the Israeli Defense Forces because our countries share common ideals of freedom and democracy and mutual respect for all people, something that I know firsthand is not common in most of the Middle East.

During my time in Israel, I served alongside soldiers driven by love for their fellow man rather than by hatred for their neighbors. I learned with each family that I got to know just how much each family truly desires peace with every neighbor of Israel, regardless of their religion or their history with those countries. The same cannot be said of Israel's enemies.

For the United States, the choice is very clear: we either stand with a historic friend and ally who shares our values, or we cave to groups like the Palestinians or countries like Iran who

represent everything that the United States is not.

I have found that the most important time to stand for what is right is when it is the most difficult time to stand for what is right. This moment in history is no different. We have to be proud of who we are, and we have to stand with those who stand with us and stand against any terrorist regime who seeks to threaten even one of us.

Mr. Speaker, the last thing that I want to say tonight is simply that it is a tremendous honor to have the opportunity to serve the people of Florida's 18th Congressional District. I know very well that the office that I occupy, it doesn't truly belong to me. It belongs to those people. And the simple fact is that the status quo has not been good enough for them. Families across the country, they are hurting, and I know that we have a lot of work to do.

I have laid out a number of priorities to help the 18th District and to strengthen our country, but I also know this: the problems Washington, D.C. is facing, they cannot just be fixed with bills and laws.

One of the most important lessons that I ever learned in the military, that I ever learned in combat, was that inspiration matters. Military leaders that I had who displayed courage and valor and selflessness, they drew the exact same thing out of every single soldier that surrounded them. And that is my goal as I am here in the Halls of Congress, every day, that I work to, above all, inspire each peer that I have here, Republican and Democrat, to have courage and to make sure that their sense of duty is to America above anything else, and to make sure that we serve selflessly and, every day that we are given the honor to serve here, to make this country and our communities that much better.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, as you can tell, the passion that this class brings is no more better exemplified than by our friend from Florida (Mr. MAST).

We now go back north. All over this election, it was an election heard clear all over the country, from the north to the south, to the areas in between, from Georgia to California. We have new voices, fresh voices here, ones who come from business, who made their life helping others find the workforce skills, the development.

That is what my friend, Mr. MITCHELL, from Michigan's 10th Congressional District, PAUL MITCHELL has done. He has made that a process in his life, one that he wants to lead, and he wants to lead by helping others. There is no greater satisfaction than to watch somebody else that you have helped succeed, and he understands that. So he brings that desire to us tonight.

He comes from the wonderful State of Michigan. He is a Spartan, Michigan State University. As he comes along tonight, we look forward to what PAUL MITCHELL from Michigan's 10th Con-

gressional District is going to bring to us tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. MITCHELL).

Mr. MITCHELL. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to thank the people of Michigan's 10th Congressional District. I am honored to represent them and humbled by their trust in electing me to the 115th Congress.

The weight of this office is not lost on me. As Majority Leader MCCARTHY said:

If you walk on the floor of this House and you don't get goosebumps, it's time to go home.

Standing here at this podium, I have goosebumps.

People often ask me why I ran for Congress. Put simply, I ran with the goal of helping people achieve their American Dream. For too many, the idea of the American Dream is just that: an idea, a fantasy, a fairytale.

I believe in the American Dream because I have lived it. I was born in South Boston to a working class family. Opportunity took my family to Michigan when I was 11. My dad got a good job building trucks on the line at General Motors, and my mom worked at the Salvation Army. My parents worked hard to provide for me and my six younger siblings. I learned the value of hard work at a young age watching my parents.

I was the first of my extended family to go to college and worked full-time to pay for my education; and then I dedicated my career to workforce training, helping people build the skills necessary to get good jobs to begin their careers to support their families. There is something about the pride that comes when someone gets a job. Their whole world changes when they see what they are able to achieve and what their work does for their families.

Over the last several years, failed policies and an unstable economy have put the American Dream out of reach for many. Though overall unemployment rates are down, long-term unemployment is high; labor force participation rates have dropped dramatically, and wage growth is anemic.

□ 1845

Instead of getting ahead, many Americans are just getting by.

In the November elections, Americans screamed for relief. My message to the people of Michigan's 10th District is that your voices have been heard. We are already working here in the House on measures to roll back regulations to support families, businesses, and the economy, and to breathe life back into the American Dream.

In order to make it possible for more people to achieve their American Dream, we must give them the freedom and the tools to succeed. This begins by stemming the extreme regulatory overreach, fixing our healthcare system, and strengthening our workforce

while restoring our critical infrastructure.

As we have learned in the last 8 years, we cannot regulate our way towards a stronger economy. The opposite is true: government overreach cripples our economy. From my years of running a business, I have firsthand knowledge of how excessive regulations make it harder to succeed. Time and resources that could be better spent on growing a business and creating jobs are spent navigating a never-ending and confusing maze of Federal regulations.

Many of those regulations have been imposed without a cost-benefit analysis, placing costly burdens on families and businesses while providing little benefit. Regulators have exceeded their authority by placing undue burdens on those struggling to make the economy work.

The House has already acted by passing the REINS Act and the Midnight Rules Relief Act. Each of these measures would put accountability where it rightly belongs: with the people's elected Representatives in Congress, not with unelected bureaucrats.

We are also reforming health care in American to prevent further harm to families and businesses. Patients and doctors should be in charge of their health care, not the government. Since the Affordable Care Act was passed, patient choice and access to care has declined while costs are ever increasing.

Despite all of the promises, many people who had plans or doctors they liked could not keep them. Insurance carriers are forced to severely narrow their networks to combat cost.

Our healthcare reform is a better way to increase accessibility and patient choice, in addition to reducing cost. We will do that by allowing purchase of coverage across State lines, authorizing businesses and individuals to band together to increase purchasing power and negotiate prices, allowing health savings accounts, and expanding risk pools. Our plan focuses on putting power where it belongs: with the people, with the patients.

Government overreach does not stop with our health care. I know that surprises you. The one-size-fits-all approach to education legislation in recent years has failed America's students. It is time to put parents and individuals in control of their education and give them options that will best suit their needs. I am eager to advance solutions that will help students learn and be better equipped for future jobs, to create flexibility for working families and prepare the workforce for a modern economy.

In addition to a strong workforce, our modern economy requires a robust infrastructure. It is essential that we protect and strengthen America's infrastructure to keep Americans safe and create jobs, and I plan to work with this House to do just that.

There is much work to be done, but I stand ready to work with my col-

leagues in the House and Senate to re-visit the American Dream. It is more than an idea. It should be more than a wish. I have lived it, and I want every young person in America to have the ability to pursue their American Dream.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. I thank the gentleman for bringing that passion for helping others, for bringing that passion to teach.

I have always said that I believe that those who want to get involved in politics and run for elected office, there are two things that they need to be a part of. Number one, they need to care for people deeply. They need to make sure that they have people at the first and foremost. They need to have alligator skin to let a lot of things roll off their back, but they also need to have a heart that cares. They also need to be willing to understand that our job involves teaching; and, Paul, I appreciate you sharing that.

Our next speaker for the night, we share not only the privilege of serving the people's House, but we also shared, up until just recently, a common passion. We both served in the United States Air Force. General Bacon distinguished himself in that regard, helping our airmen all across the world, doing so with integrity and doing so with a passion for this country that he will bring to this floor, and we are excited about that.

He will take that passion for what is really the concerns of the world and be a part of it. When I saw that in the Nebraska Home, when I went out there and was walking with him and seeing and listening to him talk, you could hear the desire to serve and to be a part of the wonderful heartland of America.

I don't believe, Mr. Speaker, they could have sent a better witness to not only blue proud Air Force values, but also American values. And, hopefully, as we continue, all will see the Nebraska values shown in General DON BACON.

With that, I yield to the gentleman from Nebraska's Second Congressional District (Mr. BACON).

Mr. BACON. I thank the gentleman from Georgia for yielding, and, Mr. Speaker, what an honor to be able to introduce myself as a freshman of the 115th Congress and serve with some great colleagues and freshmen. It is great to be called a freshman again. It has been a long time since I have been called a freshman.

I am very honored to serve the Second District of Nebraska. It is one of three districts of the State that consists of a county-and-a-half around Omaha, and it is a great home, a great place to live.

I was raised on a farm in a small town in Illinois, Momence, Illinois, a town of about 1,800. We had corn, soybeans—I baled hay four times a year—beef cattle, and I did that until I was 21 years old. I know firsthand how hard our farmers work to make a living, and

it is an honor to be able to serve on the Agriculture Committee to make a difference there.

I started serving in the Air Force back in 1985 as a 21-year-old, as a newlywed. My wife and I had 16 assignments; four different continents we were located in, coast to coast, and a lot of places in the middle. I was very honored to be able to serve as a commander of five different units, to include Ramstein Air Base in Germany. And there I got to see firsthand the importance of working with our allies and the importance of NATO, and I am going to take that experience with me.

I was also honored to serve as the commander of Offutt Air Force Base near Omaha, Nebraska. I loved the missions there. I loved the people. I had several different flying missions, a nuclear mission there as well, and I look forward to being a strong voice for Offutt and our military community there.

I was also able to deploy four times to the Middle East, and I look forward to using the experiences that I have learned to make sure that our men and women are equipped and trained to win.

I also did missile defense in Israel. It was an honor to work with our Israeli friends. I look forward to being a strong voice to improve the friendship with our great ally Israel.

Out of those 16 assignments, I did have three assignments at Offutt, and I will tell you that my wife, Angie, and I loved eastern Nebraska. The people are friendly. They have character. They love the military. And we are so blessed to be able to call it our home now, and so honored to be able to represent the great people of the Second District.

I will be serving on three different committees. I will be on the Armed Services Committee, the Agriculture Committee, and the Small Business Committee. I look forward to using my experiences to make a difference in all three. I am going to work my hardest on all three to make a difference.

One thing I am certain of: when Americans are put on a level playing field, we win. When our businessmen and -women and when our farmers are put on a level playing field, we win.

It has been our own government that has put our citizens at a disadvantage: high corporate taxes, regulations, our broken healthcare system. I am going to dedicate myself to fixing these because we need to help our Nation get on this level playing field where we start prospering and succeeding once again.

During my time at Congress, I look forward to doing the following and focusing on the following goals:

I want to reduce the burdensome regulations. And we have had a great start in the 115th Congress. It is so exciting to see the great votes we have already taken. We have over 3,000 regulations, on average, that are put out by our agencies. And when you add up the cost

of those from the past and those present, it adds up to almost \$2 trillion, Mr. Speaker. That is almost 10 percent of our GDP, and it falls unfairly on our small business community, our farmers, and we have got to do better.

We need to reduce the cost of health care, and we are starting to work on that now. I look forward to being part of the solution. We need to ensure that folks have patient-centered health care that is supported by their doctors, not Federal bureaucrats running their health care where it is a one-size-fits-all approach.

I am going to work hard to open up markets for farmers and ranchers. Nebraska has such a great agriculture, farming, and ranching community. We are going to give them that opportunity, and we are going to work hard to do it.

I am going to work hard to reform a broken Tax Code. It is not right that our Nation has the highest corporate taxes, and it puts us at a disadvantage when we compete overseas and with our neighbors. We must fix that.

I want to work hard to rebuild and restore our military's readiness. It is hard to believe, Mr. Speaker, that our readiness is at the lowest level since post-Vietnam, and it is wrong. We have got to fix it.

Finally, I want to work hard to restore our allies' faith in our Nation. Leading from behind has been a failure.

I will close with this thought, and it is something that I communicated much during the campaign. Winning elections is not the goal, but it is a means to an end.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to work hard in this Congress and I am going to be dedicated to working my hardest to deliver results for the American people and our district. It is about defending liberty. It is about ensuring that we have opportunity and prosperity for the next generations. It is about making sure that our Nation stays secure.

I thank the gentleman again for this opportunity to introduce myself.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. It is good to have the General here.

It is going to be an interesting time. I know you are the last speaker here, but not the last of all of the freshmen. We are going to be doing this more in the coming weeks. But I just know as I watch tonight, it is the passion of your class coming in.

I have watched you all as you have come and gone through orientation and done all of the things together and that there is a bond. I notice you come and sit together and you all talk together, and there is an understanding that you all come here for a purpose bigger than yourselves—and that is exciting to see. So I am excited to have you here. It is going to be a good year.

Mr. Speaker, as we have introduced and talked about these new Members and they have allowed themselves to introduce themselves, one of the things that I wanted to do is just make sure,

as we look ahead, we see folks who have made a place—they made a place in their communities; they made a place in their homes. As they look forward to serving here in this Congress, we are looking forward to having them here.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take just a few moments to discuss something else, and that is, as we move forward and as we continue here, the majority, with these new freshmen and all coming in, are going to be fighting for what matters. It is sort of amazing to me now that, as we enter tomorrow and we take the first step toward repealing, really, what is a disastrous law, it is amazing now the cries of: Oh, what is going to be done? What are you doing now? But it didn't seem to matter just a few years ago when they said: Here is what you are going to have. You are going to take it no matter what it does. You want your doctor? Keep him.

That is a lie.

You want to keep your health provider? Keep him. Your insurance is fine.

That is a lie. It is amazing now how some on the other side are just wanting to start yelling and saying: Oh, you have got to have a plan.

Have a plan?

Let's remind the American people why we are here. The majority is here because of 6 years of poor decision-making. It started at the base and has gone up. And we are going to continue as this majority to put people first, those who get up every morning, who want a job, who want to be able to go to their job and to start businesses and start and use that intellectual capital so that they can continue to do those things without government interference.

I heard just the other day as I was here working on a rule, Mr. Speaker, I heard one of the speakers actually say that we should not put these burdens on government employees because it would make their jobs so much harder.

Please, tell me where the voice is for the American worker out in the field every day just trying to make ends meet. It is in this majority. And we will continue to put forth policy that takes away the government overreach and puts it back where it belongs, and that is in the entrepreneurs, the moms, the dads, the kids, those who have a dream right now in a freshman English class or a science class, that have a dream that one day they will own their own business or go further.

Mr. Speaker, let's put this in perspective. This majority is putting people first, and over the past 6 years, the American people have responded. It is now our time to act. People say, if you don't have a plan, then you are not understanding. This is friends and neighbors that elected us, and we will not fail in this moment.

We have said what we are going to do. We are going to put people first in their businesses, in their jobs, and in their health care. When we do that, that is what makes America great.

So tonight is the first night for letting our freshmen come, share their heart. We have heard their passion. We are going to continue to hear their passion as new and more freshmen come.

Mr. Speaker, you are part of that. There are many others that will be a part. I am looking forward to leading in our majority, putting people first, putting Americans first, and this country is going to be the better for it.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of our time.

□ 1900

CONGRESSIONAL PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS: THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION NOMINEES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentlewoman from New Jersey (Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from New Jersey?

There was no objection.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, I am here this evening representing the Congressional Progressive Caucus in this Special Order hour, and I will be joined by colleagues as we will examine what our future appears to look like as we plan for the transition which is taking place. We are 8 days away from a new President and administration that continues to refuse to put Americans first and complicit with Republican-controlled Congress that will help them execute that mission.

At 1 a.m. this morning, 51 Republican Senators voted to repeal the Affordable Care Act with no replacement. After 6 years of hollow grandstanding, Republicans now know that their plan to repeal the ACA would dump massive costs on families, businesses, and the Federal budget. The facts are clear, Mr. Speaker.

Republicans' repeal of the ACA would result in the loss of 2.6 million jobs and more than 250 billion—that is billion, B—of gross State products in 2019 alone. Family budgets and State budgets alike would be rocked by the reverberations of the repeal. And we cannot forget about our healthcare providers.

The repeal of the ACA will crumble our critical healthcare infrastructure, decimating hospitals' and healthcare systems' ability to provide services, weaken local economies that hospitals help sustain and grow, and result in massive job losses of healthcare professionals. While Republicans claim to champion reducing the deficit, OMB calculates that the Republican budget